

December 7, 2018

Federal Communications Commission  
445 12th Street, SW  
Washington, DC 20554

Re: Docket 18-336  
Implementation of the National Suicide Hotline Improvement Act of 2018

Dear Commissioners:

As a non-profit community mental health organization invested in public mental health and the prevention of suicide in our country, I am writing to urge you to designate a 3-digit code as a Behavioral Health and Suicide Crisis Lifeline.

Suicide death and related human suffering including overdose and mental illness are at record highs in the United States. Despite many valuable efforts, our resources cannot meet this level of need. At this crucial juncture we urgently need to expand upon the nation's greatest resource for support and self-help to prevent suicide death.

The National Suicide Prevention Lifeline network of community-based call centers is a uniquely valuable service that connects with millions of callers in crisis annually. As recommended by the Congressional special mandate to the Commission, the creation of the Lifeline national behavioral health and suicide N-11 number makes this service readily accessible, to the benefit of all of America's communities.

In 2004, the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) launched the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline as an integrated national effort to reach people in crisis, using the single number 1-800-273-8255 as a uniform access point to connect to crisis services. The Lifeline has been a tremendous success, receiving over 2 million calls last year, including over 700,000 calls to the national Veterans Crisis Line.

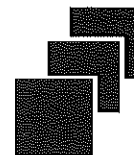
**Three-digit access is a natural next step given the growth and proven effectiveness of the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline.**

Three-digit access will:

- Deliver timely and effective crisis intervention services to millions of Americans
- Make it easier to connect people in need with help
- Help eliminate the stigma of mental health by normalizing help seeking for mental illness with the same priority we deliver for services like fire and rescue, social service referral, and telecommunication referral for people with hearing disabilities

The Centers for Disease Control has reported that over 40,000 Americans died by suicide last year – driving the national suicide rate to its highest rate in decades. The CDC also reported that drug overdose deaths had climbed to an all-time high – killing over 70,000 people last year – deaths that often represent

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a failure of effective mental health intervention, as people facing untreated mental illness resort to “self-medication” through illicit drugs.

The National Suicide Prevention Lifeline saves lives every day, helping thousands of people each day find a way forward through their darkest moments. Highly trained call counselors, at the linked Veterans Crisis Line and over 160 call centers across the nation, help over 2 million Americans and their families each year cope with the challenges of mental wellness and suicidal crisis. Extensive, independent research has proven the effectiveness of crisis intervention by the highly trained counselors of the Lifeline affiliates nationwide.

A three-digit access line can help reduce the pervasive stigma associated with mental health challenges. A 3-digit access number for crisis services represents a national recognition that seeking help for behavioral health and suicidal crisis is just as much a part of life as seeking help for fire, for injury, or for other health and wellness needs.

Finally, the Commission has received comments suggesting that 211 Info be used for 3-digit access to crisis intervention, rather than a dedicated behavioral health and suicide lifeline. We have great concerns as to the burden this would impose on that network, and the delay that could occur as a result – rather than expediting access as Congress intends.

As an organization dedicated to enhancing mental health and reducing suicide we at North Central Mental Health Services urge the FCC to make this designation. We are convinced that dedicated three-digit access is a crucial opportunity to reach millions of Americans experiencing behavioral health or suicidal crisis.

Thank you very much for your engagement in this issue that affects millions of lives in our country every year.

Respectfully yours,

Hannah Thompson  
Coordinator, Suicide Prevention Services  
North Central Mental Health Services